

3/7 1 FENCES DRAMA

\$46 MILL BO 1946 SCREENS PG-13 139 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Denzel Washington (TRAINING DAY, THE NEGOTIATOR, SAFE HOUSE, UNSTOPPABLE, THE BONE COLLECTOR, THE SEIGE)

Viola Davis (SUICIDE SQUAD, ENDER'S GAME, WON'T BACK DOWN, BEAUTIFUL CREATURES, THE HELP)

The most famous play of August Wilson's century-spanning Pittsburgh Cycle, *Fences* is alive to the oratorical vitality of private African-American theater. The characters are those unnoticed in mainstream Caucasian society, living as garbage truck drivers, hustlers, low-income homemakers, and damaged war veterans brushed in and out of hospital wards. These characters quietly bolster our American infrastructure, working unglamorous jobs, yet Wilson imbues them with the heft of tragedy that's normally reserved for white protagonists. *Fences* has the empathy to suggest that a failed black athlete and ex-con has as much right to be Willy Loman as Willy Loman. In his own backyard, his realm, this fallen man is reborn as a master dramatist, spinning stories of the history of his life with bitterly ribald vigor, infecting his family with his greatness as well as his poison.

As a director, Denzel Washington is aware of these nuances, mounting a film adaptation of *Fences* that tries to honor the macro of the play's meaning as well as the true manna of its being: the micro of romantic longing, self-loathing, and nostalgia. Washington's non-direction of the play is so quaint that it nearly does a loop-de-loop



into the realm of the avant-garde; the rarefied, sentimentalized, polished-looking 1950s-era Pittsburgh of the film suggests nothing more than a series of theatrical backdrops.

This studied quaintness is evocative in fits and starts. The film's opening promisingly follows Troy (Washington) and Bono (Stephen Henderson) as they ride through Pittsburgh on the back of a garbage truck, making their rounds emptying the trash, talking of Troy's recent brush with sanitation authorities after he asks about the city's lack of black drivers. The camera follows these men in long shots that emphasize the theatricality of Wilson's dialogue, allowing it and the actors to do the formal heavy lifting. This unapologetically talky tempo is initially exhilarating for its surreal artiness (the assertion that dialogue is inherently antithetical to cinema is a myth), particularly when Washington continues to follow the characters as they get off work and gradually mosey over to Troy's backyard. Their walking pointedly suggesting a transition into an alternate realm, a daydream of past simplicity that's cut through with the inescapable reproach of systemic despair.

This opening confluence of cinema and theater represents the only formal decision that Washington makes as a filmmaker, as he operates from the belief that the play and his cast are enough—that any further interpretation is either blasphemous or superfluous. This isn't to suggest that Washington should "open up" Wilson for cinema, but that he should be willing to complement his performers with imagery that bolsters and affirms the emotions they conjure. Washington provides literal-minded "coverage," sometimes breaking the rhythm of a monologue to cut to a perfunctory reaction shot of another actor. Watching the film, one might wonder what a daring African-American director might have done with this cast, such as Spike Lee or Barry Jenkins, artists intensely aware of the physicality of actors.

This will rent as well as **THE BIRTH OF A NATION, DENIAL, THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN, SULLY, OUR KIND OF TRAITOR, FREE STATE OF JONES** and **RACE**.



3/7 2 JACKIE DRAMA
\$12 MILL BO 1867 SCREENS R 100 MINUTES
DVD/ COMBO

**Natalie Portman (BLACK SWAN, THE PROFESSIONAL, THOR,
NO STRINGS ATTACHED, GARDEN STATE, COLD
MOUNTAIN)**

Let me state here and now that with her brilliant, courageous and superb performance as Jackie Kennedy in Jackie, Oscar winner Natalie Portman becomes the absolute frontrunner for the Academy Award as Best Actress. She gives a galvanizing portrait of a First Lady torn apart by grief, horrified by what happened to her husband just inches from her, and wanting to preserve his legacy before they climb over his coffin into the Oval Office. It is one of the most remarkable performances I have seen in the recent years and the finest work of Portman's career.

The film takes place a week after the Kennedy assassination when a reporter is sent to interview her hoping to get the truth of how she feels, and how she is coping. Frail, guarded, nearly overwhelmed with grief and a sense of loss yet simmering with outrage at what was done to her family, she speaks the truth to him, though makes it clear he will not be permitted to use all of it, that she will not give them. She details the nightmare of the assassination, of his head exploding blood and brains onto her, his body slumping down into her lap where she tried feverishly to stop the blood and put the shattered skull back together. She talks of the frightening ride to the hospital, of wiping the blood and brains off her face after her husband was pronounced dead, and Johnson was sworn in, and she talks candidly about the funeral and the fight to honor JFK properly.



Sometimes quaking with anguish, knowing she is sharing her own grief with the entire country, possibly the world, she does her best to hold things together for her children. But in her private moments, and remember she was intensely private, she allows her emotions to come over her and feels the pain, the hurt, the deep sense of loss.

It is a shattering performance of startling realism that strokes the soul of anyone watching. Portman nails every aspect of Jackie, from the speech pattern, the awkward movements when on TV, through to the ferocious mother who would protect her children at all costs.

Peter Saarsgard is Bobby Kennedy and rather muted, though he does allow us to see the caustic side of Bobby, who was openly devastated by his brothers shooting and had himself just another five years to live. I was surprised he made no effort to bring to the part that pronounced Kennedy accent, choosing instead to capture the hurt of the character and the nastiness Bobby was known for.

In every way this is Portman's film and the gifted actress we have watch grow up on-screen does the finest work of her career in her most challenging role. Breathtaking.

This will rent as well as **MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN, SNOWDEN, MONEY MONSTER, ALLIED, and 13 HOURS.**



3/7 1 MOANA FAMILY
\$227 MILL BO 3875 SCREENS PG 107 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO/3 DISC 3 D

VOICES OF: Dwayne Johnson, Rachel House

The film gets its exposition out of the way early, framing millennia of background mythology and history to explain the diaspora of Polynesians across the Pacific islands and a blight that destroys all vegetation as the result of foul play by a mischievous demigod, Maui (Dwayne Johnson). This opening is rather sluggish, and it's thankfully followed in short order by the more nuanced, emotionally driven take on the evolution of Moana (Auli'i Cravalho), the daughter of an island chieftain (Temuera Morrison). The girl's love of and supernatural affinity for the ocean are sternly repressed by her father, who fears the dangers of open water, and a montage set to song establishes a brief lifetime defined by a frustrating denial of desire.

Compared to your average Disney princesses, Moana is neither selfishly rebellious nor simplistically innocent. Her longing for the sea isn't just a flight of fancy, but an innate cultural pull that superstitious tradition has thinly covered. When the mysterious plague begins affecting her island's crops, she sets off across the ocean to find Maui and convince him to fix things by returning the heart he stole from her people's nurturing creator goddess.



Moana's seafaring voyage provides a challenge for the animators. As animation grows ever more intricate and detailed with ever-improving technology, a film in which the vast majority of scenes take place against expanses of blue water that stretch into the horizon reduces the amount of freely available eye candy. As such, it falls to character expression and body language to provide most of the visual dynamism, and Moana's determination and inexperience play out in her energetic but uncertain movements around her canoe, her eagerness regularly colliding with her lack of sailing knowledge. Later, when Moana finds Maui and he reluctantly joins her, his own surly condescension adds a contrast for her attitude, and his vast body provides neat diversions in the form of his semi-sentient tattoos, which dance and warp and even converse with him in judgmental gesticulations.

Certain aspects of the film reveal the limitations of the Disney formula. One can easily map out the narrative beats between Moana and Maui from the moment they meet, including the demigod's inevitable moment of self-doubt and the girl's inspirational speech to motivate him. When Moana sets sail, she learns that she inadvertently brought with her Hei Hei, an outrageously stupid chicken that marks a new extreme in Disney's penchant for saddling its heroes with a goofy and all but useless animal pal. The film even lampshades its clichés through Maui, who calls out obligatory moments of personal conflict and resolution and links Moana to a long line of Disney heroines by saying, "If you wear a dress and have an animal sidekick, you're a princess."

This will rent as huge as **MINIONS, ZOOTOPIA, KUNG FU PANDA 3, PETE'S DRAGON, FINDING DORY, THE BFG and THE JUNGLE BOOK.**



3/14 2 COLLATERAL BEAUTY DRAMA

\$33 MILL BO 2135 SCREENS PG-13 97 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY 28 DAYS BEFORE REDBOX

**Will Smith (MEN IN BLACK, CONCUSSION, SUICIDE SQUAD, SEVEN POUNDS, ALI, HANCOCK, ENEMY OF THE STATE)
Edward Norton (MOONRISE KINGDOM, THE BOURNE LEGACY, PRIDE AND GLORY, THE INCREDIBLE HULK)
Kate Winslet (TRIPLE 9, THE DRESSMAKER, DIVERGENT, STEVE JOBS, FINDING NEVERLAND)**

“The audience for a movie of this kind becomes the lowest common denominator of feeling: a sponge.” So wrote Pauline Kael in response to *The Sound of Music*, blaming the victims when it was still politically correct to do so. Looking into Hollywood’s dollar-sign eyes quickly explains how the film industry sidestepped laying prostrate at Kael’s hemline, and yet how often have shameless tearjerkers really run the table at the box office in this millennium? Do modern audiences still need their catharsis delivered via the safety of chosen trigger warnings? Has the nobility of the collective cry been mitigated by just how many actual life opportunities we’ve been dealt?

In a recent podcast, *Film Comment* explored the film function most regularly maligned by, well, the magazine’s core demographic: [jerking tears](#). And they wisely included among that week’s panel one of high culture’s lone remaining proponents of craft-driven cinematic populism: Mark Harris. The panel congregated around writer-director Kenneth Lonergan’s funereal *Manchester by the Sea*, understandably, but one regrets that they didn’t wait a few weeks for the arrival of David Frankel’s *Collateral Beauty*, to contrast thesis with antithesis. Not every tear tastes bittersweet.

The difference between the film that *Collateral Beauty* is and the film that its previews are trying to sell us is far more interesting than either. (Not a high benchmark, admittedly.) The preview positions Sad Will Smith being visited by



the three ghosts of secular Christmas films past, all quite fixated on making him cry so that he may finally move on with his life, which like the elaborate domino sequences he orchestrates has been in an eternal state of collapse since the death of his young daughter. He’s written letters to Love, Time, and Death—and then they start sitting next to him on park benches for pithy chats.

The preview sells prospective audiences on the simple magic of redemption, taking life’s guiding philosophical concerns and letting Hallmark Channel-grade dialogue do all the digesting for you. It leads you to believe that none of Sad Will Smith’s co-workers—Sorta Sad Kate Winslet, Almost Sad Edward Norton, and Not Particularly Sad Michael Peña—believe that he’s conversing with the recipients of his correspondence. The preview suggests that only when we believe do we see, literally, the extraordinary in our own lives.

This will rent as well as **THE GIRL ON THE TRAIN, 45 YEARS, TRUTH, SULLY, SNOWDEN, and CONCUSSION.**



3/14 3 ELLE DRAMA \$3 MILL BO
209 SCREENS R 130 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

**Isabelle Huppert (VALLEY OF FEARS, LOUDER THAN BOMBS,
DEAD MAN DOWN, GHOST RIVER)**

Who else but Isabelle Huppert could have played Michèle Leblanc, the eponymous heroine of Paul Verhoeven's *Elle*? The exuberant gravitas, the unapologetic condescension, the classily managed aggression that only the most French of faces could ever entertain—Huppert reduces us to our prosaic mortality with a glance, the pursing of her lips, the nearly imperceptible raising of an eyebrow, or the perverse delivery of a syllable. Perhaps a syllable like “oh...,” the title of the Philippe Djian novel on which the film is based. This is the “oh...” of deflating disappointment, but also of the most calculating seductions; the feminine “oh...” of flirtation; the theatrical “oh...” of predators posing as prey; the “oh...” of orgasms authentic and feigned.

Huppert's Michèle, the proprietor of her own video-game company and boss-in-chief of her son, Vincent (Jonas Bloquet), and ex-husband, Richard (Charles Berling), is full of self-conviction and a scrumptious sense of entitlement. Her kind of “shade” is too sophisticated for Madonna, Anna Wintour, and even Bette Davis's mythic self-assurance not to pale as vulgar affectation in comparison. Divas of yore are mere amateurs in the art of making feminine façade into the most sadistic of snares. In *Elle*, no one stands a chance before Michèle's castrating *froideur*. Why, then, would the response of such a superlative business woman to her own rape, a crime that initiates the film, be one of resignation, and, dare we say, one of enjoyment? How could the same woman who steps all over those whose default positions would be to step all over her, someone for whom control seems to come so naturally, lace her revenge with a presumably masochistic desire for repetition?



For audiences, perhaps more disturbing than the violence that Michèle suffers will be, yes, the pleasure she takes in hoping, even demanding, that it happens again. This is a desire that Verhoeven renders less cryptic by evoking a specific source for her fantasies of injury: Michèle's mass-murderer of a father. The character's childhood history of violence could have felt like a silly copout, akin to the introductory scenes from Adrian Lyne's *Lolita*, where Humbert Humbert's pedophilic desire is blamed on a precise trauma, were it not for the fact that the paternal violence of *Elle* is clearly just a more methodical rendition of the misogyny of everyday life.

This will rent as well as **45 YEARS, SHUT IN, DENIAL, SNOWDEN, and NERVE.**



3/14 1 SING FAMILY

\$256 MILL BO 4129 SCREENS PG 108 MINUTES
DVD/ COMBO

VOICES OF Matthew McConaughey , Reese Witherspoon.

It's a sign when a film is crammed with characters, plotlines, gags, and musical numbers as *Sing* leaves one thinking more about how much money in clearance rights had to be paid for all the songs on its soundtrack than about what those songs signify in the context of the film itself. But then, such is the nature of Garth Jennings's animated production, which feels less like the work of an artist burning to put across a deeply personal vision than a slick commercial product designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. *Sing* has something for everybody: a soundtrack that features everything from pop songs to staples of the great American songbook; storylines that evoke domestic, romantic, and gangster melodramas; and an uplifting celebration of the ostensible ability of anyone to sing if they just love it enough.

Anyone, though, wanting for depth of characterization, wit, or visual splendor will have to look elsewhere. There's nothing particularly inspired about the animation here; even some of the creatures in Illumination Entertainment's last film, [The Secret Life of Pets](#), had a few interesting designs to them. Other than an inventive visual gag in which a pig housewife, Rosita (voiced by Reese Witherspoon), comes up with a Rube Goldbergian contraption to help cook and serve breakfast for her 20-odd children and husband while she tries to make her dreams of singing stardom come true, much of the humor is memorable less for its cleverness than for the velocity of its delivery.



Perhaps it doesn't matter that none of the participants of koala theater mogul Buster Moon's (Matthew McConaughey) singing competition are given much dimension beyond the archetypal; with so many characters featured, trying to develop them all might have made *Sing* feel more cumbersome than it already does. But not even Buster Moon himself is developed in a way that would make his mission to keep his late father's run-down theater palace alive through this singing contest matter to us as much as it does to him. In fact, though Buster Moon reminisces about his love of theater in an opening flashback montage, the film itself barely evinces any passion for the theater.

OH yeah, this will rent big like **THE ANGRY BIRDS MOVIE, ZOOTOPIA, TROLLS, STORKS, GHOSTBUSTERS and ICE AGE 5.**



3/21 1 ASSASSIN'S CREED ACTION
\$57 MILL BO 2876 SCREENS PG-13 105 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO 28 DAYS BEFORE RED BOX

Michael Fassbender (THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS, X-MEN: APOCALYPSE, 12 YEARS A SLAVE, STEVE JOBS)

The assassins of *Assassin's Creed* always have a literal trick up their sleeve: a spring-loaded dagger with which they can surprise and overcome their foes. The makers of this narratively and visually overwrought cinematic adaptation of the action-adventure video-game series believe that they, too, have a secret weapon: When the film stops even pretending to make a lick of sense, they simply have Michael Fassbender take off his shirt. For some, that may in fact be enough satisfaction, but it doesn't excuse the film's failure to honor both the game's historical trappings and its parkour-packed bona fides.

The basic conceit of *Assassin's Creed*, both the video-game series and film, is that there's been an ancient war between Assassins, who believe that information should be open for the betterment of humanity, and Templars, who aim to privatize knowledge for personal gain. In the modern day, Templars like Sophia Rikkin (Marion Cotillard) and her father, Alan (Jeremy Irons), are winning—using their financial resources to imprison Assassins and then hack into their memories using a technology known as the Animus. It says a lot about the lopsided mythology that we learn more about this rivalry than about the specific Assassin at the film's center: Fassbender's sarcastic and incredulous Callum Lynch, who was orphaned in 1986 and then abducted in the middle of his execution for capital crimes in 2016. The same goes for Callum's fierce and bearded ancestor, Aguilar (also played by Fassbender), for while there's actual history behind Aguilar's guerrilla resistance against the Spanish Inquisition, and his rival, Torquemada (Javier Gutiérrez), is a real figure.



This will rent as well as **HACKSAW RIDGE, NOCTURNAL ANIMALS, INFERNO, THE ACCOUNTANT and JASON BOURNE.**



3/21 1 **LION** DRAMA \$18 MILL BO
700 SCREENS **PG-13** 118 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

Dev Patel (SLUM DOG MILLIONAIRE, THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL, THE LAST AIRBENDER)
Nicole Kidman (EYES WIDE SHUT, QUEEN OF THE DESERT, STRANGER LAND, THE INVASION, TRESPASS)

Emerging from sleep on a decommissioned passenger train somewhere between Madhya Pradesh and Kolkata, five-year-old Saroo (Sunny Pawar), separated from his brother, Guddu (Abhishek Bharate), rightly panics, the locomotive's whistle enveloping his screams. Twenty years later, emerging from the sea off the coast of Australia, the young man he's become (played by Dev Patel) is the picture of calm, sleek and stoic in a jet-black wetsuit despite the crash of the waves. Garth Davis's *Lion* depicts much of the journey between these two moments, and then turns to Saroo's quest to retrace his steps, but it's their juxtaposition that signals the film's central purpose, which is to construct a character poised between two places, two selves. A staunch melodrama, imperfect but undeniably moving, *Lion* is riven by images of one man's two worlds, and propelled by his need to suture them together.

On the strength of Pawar's winsome, puckish performance, exhibiting his might by lifting a chair, then a bike, before striking his chest with his fist, the film's first act sets the fearful particulars of Saroo's story—street urchins, human traffickers, a positively Dickensian state orphanage—against the boy's keen intelligence, ably navigating between oppressiveness and triumphalism. The boy is trapped aboard the train until it reaches its destination, 1,500 kilometers away from his home, and his nighttime adventure with Guddu segues into a nightmare of lost children and bureaucratic neglect, yet Davis approaches his subject tenderly; when Saroo mimes slurping soup to a man in a restaurant window, the warmth of their connection offers a merciful glimpse, however fleeting, of kindness in cruel circumstances.



As adapted by Luke Davies from Saroo Brierly's memoir *A Long Way Home*, *Lion's* deft handling of the child's externalized emotional states, muting the familiar excesses of similar sagas, nonetheless seems too restrained, even chilly, when the film flashes forward to Saroo's adulthood. Adopted by a devoted Australian couple, John and Sue Brierly (David Wenham and Nicole Kidman), Saroo comes to embrace both his new parents' heritage and, after a fashion, their quiet reserve: When he decides to search for his biological brother and mother (Priyanka Bose), he's so protective of the Brierlys' feelings that the suspense of the film's early, India-set scenes soon dissipates, as if wrapped in the wet-suited Saroo's preternatural poise. In contrast, his dissolute adopted brother, Mantosh (Divian Ladwa), erupts in startling rages and fits, underlining the film's abrupt loss of momentum; against the organic force of young Saroo's displacement, the reliance on such fireworks to stoke the family's simmering trauma is clumsy, if not exactly cheap.

By the time *Lion* swings back in the direction of more commanding sentiments, culminating in Sue's affectingly frank description of an adoptive mother's pain, the film appears smaller, more formulaic, than the sum of its parts, though Saroo's return to India is certainly rousing. Despite underusing both Kidman and Rooney Mara, as Saroo's girlfriend, Davis's direction at least gestures at a fuller understanding of transnational identities. *Lion* crafts, through a series of fitful glimpses, a sense of the correspondences between its two settings, and not simply the juxtapositions, and as a spot-lit bridge in Melbourne becomes a predawn analogue in Saroo's birthplace, or as Tasmanian dunes melt into Indian hills, it's hard not to credit the attempt, if only partly successful, to see Saroo as a man in two places at once.

"We weren't blank pages, were we?" Saroo says of Mantosh and himself, and the film, preferring a palette of ochres and mahoganies to the bombastic color of Danny Boyle's [Slumdog Millionaire](#), is admirably attuned to

the nuance of both/and, rather than the ease of either/or. *Lion's* faults of structure and pacing might limit its power, but in stretches it still roars.

This will rent as well as did **THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, MOONLIGHT, SHUT IN, and THE LIGHT BETWEEN OCEANS.**



3/7 3 MISS SLOANE DRAMA \$4 MILL BO
1468 SCREENS R 132 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

Jessica Chastain (THE HUNTSMAN: WINTERS WAR, THE MARTIAN, A MOST VIOLENT YEAR, INTERSTELLAR, ZERO DARK THIRTY)

Perhaps before our recent presidential election, *Miss Sloane* might have seemed like it was merely reiterating the cynicism of the paranoid political thrillers that were in vogue during the 1970s. A week after, though, the distrust of government at the core of John Madden's film carries an almost cathartic charge—a breezily entertaining release valve for the frustrations many are feeling about the United States, what with a businessman and reality television star set to inhabit the highest political office in the land.

Not that *Miss Sloane* doesn't have merits beyond topical relevance. Chief among them is Jessica Chastain, who brings to the role of Elizabeth Sloane the same granitic strength and subtle vulnerability that distinguished her performance as Maya, the similarly tenacious CIA intelligence analyst from [Zero Dark Thirty](#). But while it would be a stretch to call Sloane a multifaceted character (she has little interior life beyond her desire for victory), Chastain vividly conveys the relish with which the woman approaches her tasks, managing to find emotional nuances all throughout the film to occasionally complicate our view of Sloane as a one-dimensional political shark.



Right in the film's opening scene, when Sloane, in voiceover and then in a direct, straight-ahead close-up, discusses the kind of ruthless tactical acumen it takes to succeed as a lobbyist in Washington, D.C., Chastain delivers her lines in a palpably rote manner that implies a level of exhaustion that the screenplay suggests Sloane feels toward her line of work. It's an ennui that, elsewhere, she's able to cover up with her vigorous motormouth; her energy level is occasionally heightened by the uppers she frequently takes. Such questions about what exactly drives Sloane to do this work are almost always left cloudy in Jonathan Perera's screenplay—and it's that enigmatic nature that holds one's interest throughout, even as the film veers into pat moralism.

Miss Sloane's enigmatic nature holds one's interest throughout, even as it veers into pat moralism. The plot revolves around Sloane's efforts to help a smaller firm defeat an anti-gun-control bill supported by her previous, much bigger firm. That focus on the "right" side of the gun-control issue puts Madden's film somewhat in the territory of Steven Spielberg's [Lincoln](#), another drama about behind-the-scenes political maneuvering. In Spielberg's film, however, there was never any doubt as to the ultimate worthiness of the flagrant manipulation on display in [Lincoln](#). By contrast, *Miss Sloane* isn't afraid to offset the nobility of Sloane's chosen cause by seriously questioning her motives and methods.

Why Sloane is so interested in gun control above all other issues is one thing that's never fully explained, either by her or by the film itself. As for her means, not only is she willing to use secret surveillance methods against her opponents, she also shows barely any hesitancy to shamelessly exploit even her closest allies to achieve her goals, especially Esme Manucharian (Gugu Mbatha-Raw), which is heartbreaking given Esme's personal history with gun violence. Madden's film more interestingly swims in the ambiguity of whether such near-sociopathic means are acceptable for the sake of a greater good.

The film, though, isn't willing to go all the way with that ambiguity, as proven by the ridiculous climax that goes so far as to not only paint Sloane's maneuvering in a more positive light, but also posit her as a kind of super-lobbyist with a god-like knack for being a step ahead of everybody. But even if *Miss Sloane* finally goes in the direction of extravagant wish-fulfillment, the sting of what Sloane represents in the D.C. landscape still resonates.

This will rent s well as **MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, ALLIED, THE WHOLE TRUTH, THE BIRTH OF A NATION, SNOWDEN and MOONLIGHT.**



3/21 1 **PASSENGERS** SCI/FI THRILLER
\$98 MILL BO 3589 SCREENS PG-13 106 MINUTES
DVD/BLU RAY

Jennifer Lawrence (JOY, X-MEN: APOCALYPSE, THE HUNGER GAMES: CATCHING FIRE, AMERICAN HUSTLE)
Chris Pratt (THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN, JEM AND THE HOLOGRAMS, GUARDIANS FO THE GALAXY, HER, DELIVERY MAN)

What could be a bigger science fiction than the notion that one human would agree to devote the entirety of their natural life to another human? At least, that's the viewpoint of the earnest but dopey *Passengers*, which, to the chagrin of genre buffs everywhere, sets up an epic jaunt between habitable planets and, instead of showing how 5,000 people set about colonizing a new world, focuses on the courtship of two people who were awakened from suspended animation nearly a century ahead of schedule.

Engineer Jim Preston (Chris Pratt) is jolted awake aboard the Starship Avalon after a meteor shower besieges the population-transporting vessel, kinking up the ship's computer functions. After unsuccessfully trying to program his pod back into hibernation mode, he realizes that he's going to spend the rest of his life aboard the ship alone, and die before his people reach their destination of Homeland II. Unsurprisingly finding himself bored by his own company, Jim starts to do a little research on a woman he spies in another pod and, after some deliberation, overrides her slumber. Aurora Lane (Jennifer Lawrence) is a writer on Earth, but she quickly runs out of words to share with Jim. Still, a bird in the hand is worth 4,998 in the bush, so eventually sparks fly between the two of them. And then sparks start to fly from every other corner of the ship, as systems begin going down on the regular.

This will rent pretty well as did **ARRIVAL, HACKSAW RIDGE, SUICIDE SQUAD, SULLY, and BEN HUR.**





3/21 3 SILENCE DRAMA \$7 MILL BO
1580 SCREENS R 161 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

Andrew Garfield (THE AMAZING SPIDERMAN 1 AND 2, THE SOCIAL NETWORK, HACKSAW RIDGE)

Adam Driver (TV---GIRLS---FILM---PATERSON, MIDNIGHT SPECIAL, STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS, WHILE WE'RE YOUNG, HUNGRY HEARTS)

Finally carrying out a passion project reportedly in the works since the early 1990s, filmmaker Martin Scorsese takes a different approach to this material, arraying similar story elements around a sustained crisis-of-faith narrative. His outlook is both Western and Catholic, a marked divergence from the Buddhist-oriented perspective of Shinoda's film and the Japanese Catholicism of Sh saku End , from whose 1966 novel both films are adapted. As such, this version of *Silence* is more focused on the specific spiritual experience of its Catholic interlopers, particularly the trial of having one's resolve simultaneously tested by external duress and the aloof disregard of your divinity of choice, rather than the detached depiction of a foreign religion crashing momentarily on unfriendly shores.

The film begins with two young Portuguese priests, Father Rodrigues (Andrew Garfield) and Father Garrpe (Adam Driver), demanding to be sent to the rescue of their missing mentor, Father Ferreira (Liam Neeson). After successfully gaining converts in Japan, the now-dominant Tokugawa Shogunate responded to the apparent threat of Catholicism in 1620 by clamping down borders, banning the religion and persecuting converts. The priests' journey thus amounts to a trip behind enemy lines, one further complicated by their implicit duty to serve the sacramental needs of the faithful. Arriving surreptitiously by sea, they stumble upon pockets of Christian devotees, desperate for renewal after years of practicing their faith alone and in secret.



Fixated on maintaining fidelity despite constant persecution, the Kakure Kirishitans—a local term for “hidden Christians”—exist in a sort of purgatory, dedicated to a passed-down system of belief preserved through a garbled interpretation of official doctrine. This scenario fits into a motif of miscommunication that carries throughout *Silence*, from letters to diary entries, with the cultural gap between East and West emphasized via bungled rituals, inherent disparities, and mangled names. The priests' original mission undergoes a similar process of fracturing, each effort at remedying an immediate problem resulting in ripples of harm and destruction. Such conflicts only compound themselves as they attempt to locate Ferreira, rumored to have rejected his station and taken a Japanese name, leaving Rodrigues's faith in the validity of his mission increasingly embattled.

Martin Scorsese crafts a versatile, multifaceted work that encourages serious reflection and contemplation. The authorities, meanwhile, use the peasants' alignment with nature as evidence of their unwillingness to entirely accept Christianity, clinging to its promises of paradise while integrating its iconography as window dressing for an ancient agrarian belief system. Chief among these government emissaries is Inquisitor Inoue Masashige (Issey Ogata, in a sharp performance that recalls his role as Hirohito in Alexander Sokurov's [The Sun](#)), a lispng, striding authoritarian with an ever-present retinue of swordsmen, a man of great power and dogged persistence who nonetheless needs help standing up.

The film's gradually unspooling narrative hinges both on confrontations between Rodrigues and the Inquisitor and the priest's repeated run-ins with Kichijiro (Yôsuke Kubozuka), a cowardly reprobate who's been pressured into apostasy, forced to watch his entire family burned alive for their faith. First seen sprawled drunkenly across the floor of a Macanese tavern, he reappears in various permutations, serving alternately as an unreliable guide, a cut-rate Judas, a lost soul, and a faithful servant. Kichijiro, Rodrigues, and the Inquisitor—a real-life figure who likely gained power via a discreet romantic relationship with the Shogun—all

appear in a variety of different guises and forms, their apparent changes in status and bearing indicating the film's broad-minded conception of personal and cultural identity.

Beyond even that of Father Garrpe, whose single-minded, borderline-mad dedication propels him out of the story early on, Kichijiro's moral conflict, or possible lack thereof, parallels Rodrigues's own. As the young priest grapples with his own mounting doubts, the wretched adherent's recurring cycle of absolution and treachery stands out as both a mockery of that struggle and an occasion for self-abnegating mercy, highlighting possible flaws in the system and the essential difficulty of offering genuine forgiveness.

This will rent as well as **THE INFILTRATOR, THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, GENIUS and DENIAL.**



3/28 3 A MONSTER CALLS FANTASY
\$7 MILL BO 2567 SCREENS PG-13 114 MINUTES

Sigourney Weaver (ALIEN, WORKING GIRL, ALIENS)

A Monster Calls, which places character types strategically in a rigged narrative so as to make the obvious, constantly made point that death is painful but must be properly survived by the living. Conor (Lewis MacDougall) is a less likeable than usual member of cinema's club of perennially sensitive children, who walks to the beat of his own drummer and to the predictable consternation of his grandmother (Sigourney Weaver) and the bullies at school who beat him with surprising viciousness. The only person who understands Conor is his mother (Felicity Jones), a free spirit in all caps who's dying of a vaguely defined disease, so as to offensively encourage us to process her encroaching death as a cleanly generic metaphor for change, per the tropes of most mediocre coming-of-age movies.

The reeling boy is soon visited by the Monster (Liam Neeson), a large, looming entity that sprouts promisingly out of the large tree in Conor's yard, suggesting an Ent from Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. The Monster talks tough at first, but audiences accustomed to fables of this sort will be unsurprised to learn that he's a softie at heart.

Throughout the film, director J.A. Bayona tethers this narrative to typical pop-cultural shorthand, using the story's universality as a pretense for indulging cliché: The mother's illness is dramatized with a chaste bit of hair loss, the grandmother's austerity telegraphed with the usual antique bric-a-brac, and, while Neeson gives good sage, he's rivaling Morgan Freeman for the title of most obligatory modern prophet. Even the animated stories within the larger narrative are familiar, illustrated in a paintbrush style that contrasts against the live-action procedural in a canned real/imagined binary, reflecting one of the strangest new trends in the modern children's film, which is to limit the most striking visuals to the role of fleeting grace notes.

This should rent as well as **THE BFG, MIDDLE SCHOOL, STORKS, and MISS PERIGRINES HOME FOR PECULIAR CHILDREN.**





3/28 1 FANTASTIC BEASTS FAMILY/ADVENTURE
\$241 MILL BO 4128 SCREENS PG-13 133 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO/ 3DISC 3 D

Eddie Redmayne (JUPITER ASCENDING, THE DANISH GIRL, THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING, MY WEEK WITH MARILYN)

You'd think that a pop movie that features a presidential hopeful who appears to be building his campaign around the identification and presumed persecution of a specialized class of people might at least have some serendipitous currency right now. But *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, J.K. Rowling's newest salvo in a career spent writing mostly about the world of wizards, exists so resolutely outside of salience and so doggedly within the comfort of escapism that even witch hunts, underground railroads, self-righteous religious fundamentalism, parallel societies with their own discrete presidents, and harbingers of world war are all presented with the same weightlessness of anything under Hermione Granger's levitation spell: "Wingardium leviosa."

Too timid to serve as a respectable time-killer, the film introduces Newt Scamander, a wizard-cum-zoologist who collects and protects endangered bizarre world animals in his suitcase. Fresh from skipping the pond to New York, the stiff-upper-lipped Brit Newt quickly loses his magical case in an accidental swap with one belonging to a factory worker no-maj (American for "muggle") who aspires to be a baker. (In Rowling's admittedly period-bound America, even the bluest of collars aspires to pixie-dusted confectionery.)

It's a little bit difficult to see exactly how the cases get mixed up, as director David Yates spends the film's first half seemingly unaware of the typical rules of screen direction and editing on motion. While miles away from a Yasujiro Ozu film, *Fantastic Beasts* opens with a disorienting spatial feel unusual for a mainstream blockbuster-to-be, as though the mere professionalism of blocking bodies and matching eye lines had broken down. Of course, when you're working with a lead actor so hell-bent on avoiding eye contact as Eddie Redmayne, that may have been an inevitability. That, or else the responsibility of folding a whole new cast of characters into an already overdeveloped fictional universe left no time for such irrelevant formal concerns.



The film exists resolutely outside of salience and doggedly within the comfort of escapism.

And so it is that each plot point rampages across the screen like another one of Newt's destructive, rambunctious, but oh-so-clearly misunderstood creatures. Newt's Jumanji calamity falls inconveniently amid a politically charged standoff between humans and witches, an environment just waiting for a catalyst along the lines of an Archduke Ferdinand assassination. Just when the witching community wants to keep as low a profile as they can manage, Newt's macrocephalic rhinoceros (no, not Ionesco's brand) goes on a pheromone-charged rampage through Central Park. Just when Puritanical scapegoaters are canvassing the streets with baseless pamphlets, Newt's sticky-fingered platypus is picking pockets and robbing jewelry stores. And just as witches have gotten used to erasing the memories of the no-maj community who witness evidence of their existence, Newt befriends and is assisted in world-saving feats by one of the no-maj-iest of them all.

This will rent as well as **HACKSAW RIDGE, ARRIVAL, NOCTURNAL ANIMALS, THE ACCOUNTANT, and JASON BOURNE.**



3/28 1 OFFICE CHRISTMAS PARTY COMEDY
\$59 MILL BO 2398 SCREENS R 105 MINUTES
DVD/COMBO

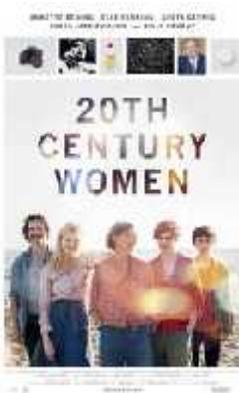
Jason Bateman (CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE, HORRIBLE BOSSES 1 & II, IDENTITY THIEF, THE CHANGE UP)
Olivia Munn (TV—THE NEWSROOM---FILM—RIDE ALONG 2, ZOOLANDER 2, X-MEN: APOCALYPSE, MAGIC MIKE)

As Josh Parker, Jason Bateman plays yet another straight man to a band of eccentrics, among them Tracey Hughes (Olivia Munn), his equally bland co-worker and possible love interest. Kate McKinnon brings her usual android-like weirdness to straight-arrow Head of Human Resources Mary Winetoss, while Rob Corddry's aggressively in-your-face shtick as sad-sack Head of Customer Service Jeremy will be familiar to loyal Jon Stewart-era *Daily Show* viewers. Elsewhere, Randall Park plays a variation on his earnestly awkward *Fresh Off the Boat* patriarch, with the twist that his seemingly harmless character turns out to have a thing for S&M. And then there's Jennifer Aniston, playing yet another horrible boss: Carol Vanstone, the ice-cold Zenotek CEO with lingering resentment toward her privileged slacker brother, Clay (T.J. Miller), who's running the company's flailing Chicago branch.

The film's barebones plot sees the folks at Zenotek trying to throw a party in a last-ditch attempt to rescue the company from financial ruin by impressing Walter Davis (Vance) with their congenial office culture. Naturally, things go disastrously awry. But as one might expect, the plot often takes a backseat to the sheer chaotic feeling of seeing all these comic actors inhabiting one enclosed space—at least until the shenanigans spill out onto the Chicago streets in the third act. This isn't necessarily a problem in and of itself. *Office Christmas Party* could be considered the fast-paced comic equivalent of the disaster movies that were prolific in the 1970s, with actors brought on less to play actual people than to bring their star wattage—or, in this case, their own distinctive comic rhythms and cadences—to the melee surrounding them.



This will rent as well as **BOO! A MADEA HALLOWEEN, KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES, THE HOLLARS, BRIDGET JONES BABY, SAUSAGE PARTY** and **BAD MOMS**.



3/28 3 20TH CENTURY WOMEN DRAMA \$4 MILL BO
650 SCREENS R 119 MINUTES DVD/BLU RAY

Annette Benning (DANNY COLLINS, RUBY SPARKS, AMERICAN BEAUTY, THE SEIGE)

Dorothea (Benning) is a surrogate mother to Abbie, a budding photographer who hasn't gotten over the years she spent within New York's punk scene, and Julie, a teen who becomes the fixation of Jamie's young life. While repeat mentions are made of Dorothea growing up during the Great Depression, the crises of capital have given way to the (very Californian) postwar crisis of the self: Abbie spends her 20s struggling with cancer because her mother had taken a fertility drug later found to be toxic, while Julie rebels against her therapist mom by getting into drugs and sex at a preternatural age. She also adopts her mother's psychologist nomenclatures, in an ostensible attempt to make sense of everyone *e/se* around her—a character wrinkle given real levity by way of Fanning's self-serious vulnerability. As if the distance between her insecurity and everybody else's were incalculable, she tells Jamie: "Guys aren't supposed to look like they're thinking about what they look like."

The screenplay refracts Jamie's coming-of-age trajectory among the members of his makeshift family, which also includes William (Billy Crudup), a former hippie who helps out around Dorothea's house, which is in a state of permanent rehabilitation. The narrative breaks to follow one character for minutes at a time, or to cushion their individual backstory with archival photographs that suggest far bigger swaths of off-screen history. There's an abiding sense that the big and small epiphanies of this family's life aren't limited to what appears in the film; each character could accord their own narrative runtime, and Mills would appear to know it.

Mike Mills's *20th Century Women* incurs sorrow at the prospect of saying goodbye to its characters.

But the privileging of auteurist omniscience feels at once novelistic and unavoidably Internet-era. The camera is used like a widescreen microscope, pausing to catalogue key specimens of each housemate's personality: Dorothea's packs of cigarettes, Abbie's books, photos that explain how William's heart was broken at a hippie commune. For viewers, much depends on whether the arguable twee nostalgia and just-so annotation that were signal bearers of Wes Anderson's heyday have become aesthetic clichés in their own right. Mills's scramble to measure every last vestige of influence on Jamie's life, one needle-drop at a time, sometimes puts the story at odds with its sense of emotional place. The script handily succeeds in establishing these people as more than mannequins in the window display of Jamie's memory, but one still suspects that there's a more conventionally structured melodrama somewhere in here held hostage by Mills's record collection.



It speaks to *20th Century Women's* emotional sprawl that it effectively contains *two* musical scores with their own returning leitmotifs, one pop-diegetic (including Bowie, Black Flag, Raincoats), the other provided by Roger Neil—a gushy main theme that seems to resurface at least a dozen times throughout the film, ambient music of the yoga-clinic waiting-room variety that teases at the bigness and wonderment of everyday life.

Dorothea's ongoing concern is about Jamie growing up too fast; eventually, it shifts into disdain for Abbie's second-wave feminism, leaving her son to choose a paradigm for himself at the dinner table. One late scene sees Abbie forcing all the men at one of Dorothea's parties to get used to saying the word "menstruation," against their own discomfort (to say nothing of the host's mortification); like the film's best moments, it's bruisingly hilarious, staged with a cringe-making anxiety that will infect all but the most blasé viewers.

20th Century Women incurs sorrow at the prospect of saying goodbye to its characters, despite having elaborated (and sometimes painstakingly so) how and why their lives might not be so different from those in the audience. Mills's screenplay is estimable in its wisdom: The filmmaker doesn't depict his former teenage self as a neurotic victim of outsized personality-sculpting, but rather as blessed witness to a handful of extraordinary women—and the film does its work in making their personalities sparkle.

This will rent as well as **MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, LOVING, DON'T THINK TWICE, BRIDGET JONES BABY, and THE HOLLARS.**